

International

BRIEFLY

Arafat, Peres meet today in Italy:

PLO leader Yasser Arafat and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres are to meet on Saturday during an economic conference in the Italian city of Milan, Israeli radio said, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

The foreign minister was to travel to Italy after returning from Kazakhstan and Arafat left Friday for Rome to meet Pope John-Paul II at the Vatican.

Walesa visit union's birthplace:

President Lech Walesa joined former co-workers Thursday at Solidarity's birthplace to mark the 15th anniversary of the union movement that shattered communist rule, AP reports from Gdansk, Poland.

As an electrician at the Gdansk shipyard, Walesa led the August 1980 strike that united workers and intellectuals across Poland and forced communist authorities to recognize Solidarity as the first independent labour federation in the Soviet bloc.

Chechens kill 5 Russian troops:

At least five Russian soldiers were reported killed and five others wounded in clashes Thursday, while Russian and Chechen officials accused each other of violating a shaky truce, AP reports from Grozny.

The Russian army command said it had to retaliate against "increasingly defiant" Chechen militants who have continuously attacked military outposts, the Interfax news agency reported.

110 tombs unearthed in China:

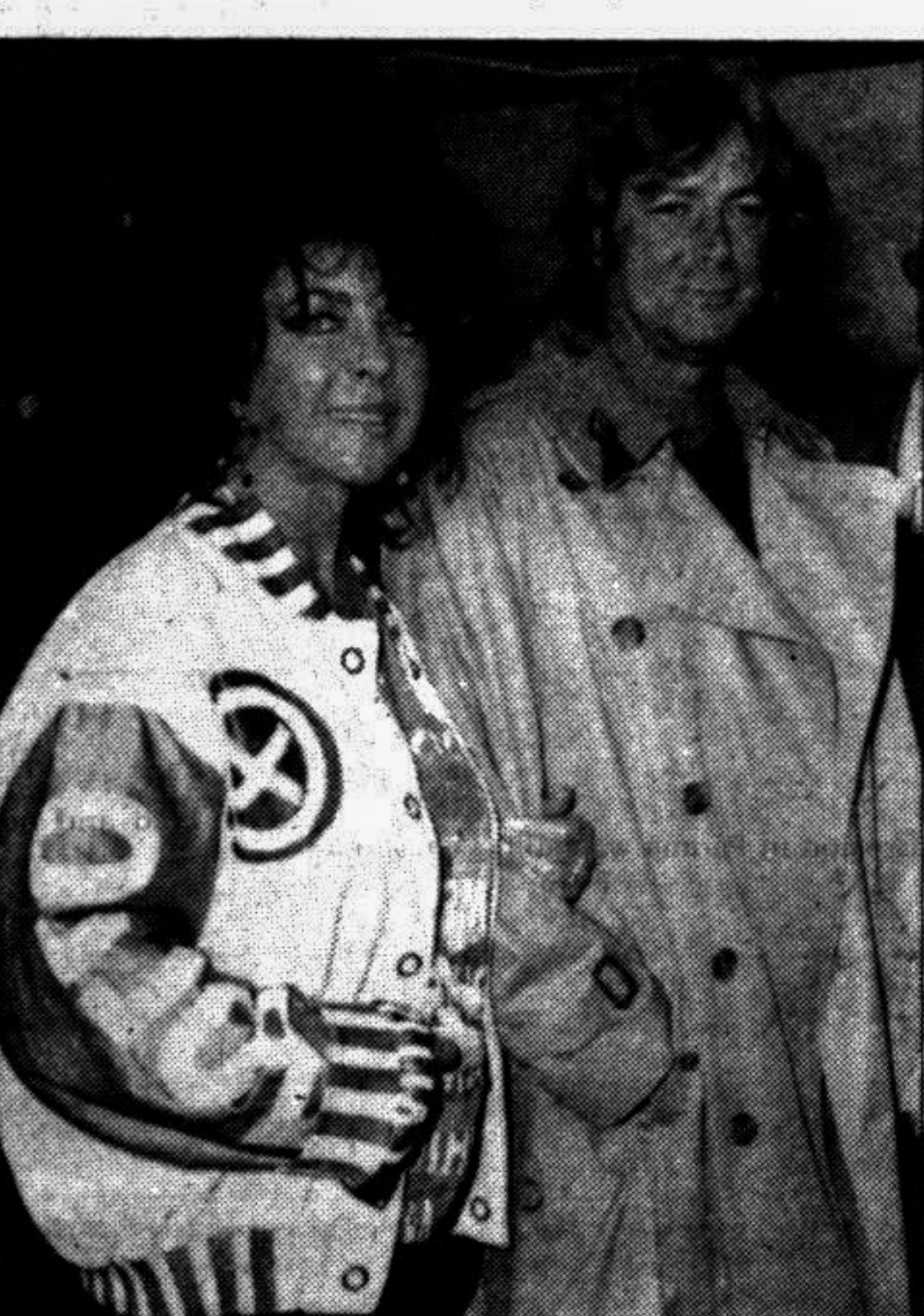
Archaeologists in north China's inner Mongolia autonomous region have unearthed some 110 tombs belonging to the eastern Hun, Nomadic tribes who roamed the area in the fifth to the third centuries BC, Xinhua reports from Hohhot.

In the tombs, located in an area of 20,000 sq m, were found hundreds of relics, including pottery, bronzeware, and jade, shells and stone ornaments.

NY to enact death penalty:

New York state will now be taking lives in attempt to save others, AP reports from Albany, New York.

After 18 years of being vetoed by Democratic governors, a death penalty law signed by Republican Gov. George Pataki took effect Friday. New York is the 38th state to enact a death penalty since 1976, when the US Supreme Court allowed states to resume capital punishment.



File photo dated April 1992 of actress Elizabeth Taylor and her husband Larry Fortensky. It was reported in the United States on Thursday that Taylor has split from her seventh husband, former construction worker Fortensky, after nearly four years of marriage. — AFP/UNB photo

Typhoon kills 30 in S China:

At least 30 people were killed by Typhoon Kent which swept through Guangdong province, southern China, Thursday, according to local authorities cited by the China Daily Friday, AFP reports from Beijing.

The typhoon, accompanied by torrential rain, lashed the eastern city of Guangzhou and other cities as well as the Shenzhen and Chuhai Special Economic Zones. It had winds at centre estimated at 140 kilometres (85 miles) an hour.

3 shot dead in Bangkok:

Three people were killed in a Thai provincial court when a court security guard whose wife had been raped opened fire on the man standing trial for the crime, police said Friday, Reuters reports from Bangkok.

The defendant, his lawyer and the defendant's wife all died as the man fired a number of shots from a hand gun at the court in the town of Kanchanaburi, 140 km (100 miles) west of Bangkok on Thursday. Two others were wounded.

Ex-Meghalaya governor Rahim dead:

Veteran Congress (I) leader and former Meghalaya Governor and Minister of State for External Affairs, A A Rahim, died at the government hospital in Kollam Friday, PTI reports from Kollam.

Rahim, 76, was admitted to the hospital Thursday night after he complained of a breathing problem. The end came shortly after noon Thursday.

Lankan official says Passengers aboard seized ferry safe

COLOMBO, Sept 1: All 136 passengers aboard a ferry seized by Tamil separatist rebels to lure naval gunboats are safe, a senior government official said today, reports AP.

"Red Cross officials visited the area and told me that the passengers are safe," said Mohammad Junaid, a top government official in the area.

The passengers, including 15 children, have been taken off the ferry and will travel by road to either the capital, Colombo, or the northeastern port of Trincomalee, he said in a telephone interview.

The official would not give further details about the visit by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The fate of the ferry or the eight crew members, four of them Sinhalese, was not clear. The 125-ton ferry is anchored off the coast of Mullaitivu, 280 kilometres (175 miles) northeast of Colombo.

Since Tuesday, warships and aircraft have kept the ferry, "Iris Moana," under surveillance from a distance, fearing that raids to rescue civilians could endanger the passengers and crew.

Sikh rebel group claims responsibility CBI announces reward to track down assassins of Beant Singh

NEW DELHI, Sept 1: Indian authorities today announced a reward of one million rupees (33,000 dollars) in a bid to track down the assassins of Chief Minister of the northern state of Punjab, reports AFP.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) said the money would be given to anyone who gave information which led to the arrest of suspects involved in Thursday's assassination of Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh.

Beant Singh, 73, was killed along with 15 others in the Punjab capital Chandigarh when a powerful bomb exploded as he got into his bullet proof car in the foyer of the government secretariat.

Nearly 20 others were injured in the deafening blast. Babbar Khalsa, a Sikh militant group which was thought to have been wiped out in a police crackdown in Punjab three years ago, claimed responsibility for the attack.

Beant Singh, a leader of Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's Congress (I) Party, became the 13th chief minister of Punjab following legislative elections in February 1992 which were boycotted by Sikh political parties.

AP adds: Singh's car and two others were ripped apart, and mutilated bodies were flung over the concrete porch of the 10-story state secretariat building. Some of its windows were blown out.

K P S Gill, Punjab's police chief, said on Friday that investigators were looking into the possibility that a suicide bomber set off the explosion, meaning that one of Singh's security guards could have been involved.

By 1992, Punjab's police and federal troops, had ruthlessly crushed a 10-year old separatist insurgency in Punjab, but at least three rebel groups survived, police said.

During the fighting, a dozen militant outfits were demanding a Sikh homeland called Khalistan, or "Land of the Pure." Punjab is the only state in mostly Hindu India with a Sikh majority.

Babbar Khalsa International was one of the fiercest rebel groups and like many others, India accused it of receiving arms and training from India's arch-enemy, neighbouring Pakistan. Islamabad has repeatedly denied.

"Beant Singh had come on top of our hit list after he betrayed our Sikh community. We had to give the death sentence to him because of this," said the Babbar Khalsa International Statement, which United News of India received.

It was singed by the group's two leaders, Wadhawan Singh and Mahal Singh. Police say they are based in Pakistan.

Singh, 73, a moderate politician in the governing Congress Party, came to power in the 1992 state legislative elections that ended eight years of federal rule in Punjab.

BOMBAY, Sept 1: A "Sonia brigade" was launched here today by supporters of the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to revamp the Congress-I and bring a change in the central leadership of the party, reports PTI.

Chairman of the Municipalised Best Committee, Suresh Patil, moved a resolution for declaring the launch of the brigade. Trade Union leader Eknath Badal who presided said Congress (I) was being weakened in Maharashtra due to attempts by some leaders to denigrate the leadership of Sharad Pawar.

'Sonia brigade' launched to revamp Cong (I)

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Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller salutes Georgian people after her arrival at Tbilisi Airport as Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze follows her Thursday. — AFP/UNB photo

MQM threatens to quit talks

KARACHI, Sept 1: The main opposition group in violence-torn Karachi Thursday accused the security forces of arresting and maltreating women members of the group and warned it would pull out of ongoing peace talks if the government did not reverse its policy within two days, reports AP.

The Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) chief negotiator Anamul Dehvi told reporters that if the security forces did not stop "harassing women activists," his group would either end the talks or call for a protest strike.

His warning followed the arrest of Seema Zareen, an MQM worker, and her father from central Karachi Thursday.

Police confirmed the arrest, saying Zareen was wanted on "serious" charges. But they did not give details.

US streamlining process for citizenship

LOS ANGELES, Sept 1: Swamped by nearly 1 million applicants a year, the Immigration and Naturalisation Service said Thursday it will spend 22 million dollars streamlining the process for turning foreigners into citizens, reports AP.

Citizenship USA aims to clear a backlog of cases and reduce the naturalisation process to six months starting next summer, INS Commissioner Doris Meissner said.

The current time lag of about a year had been expected to double because of an unprecedented surge in applicants, she said. The number of applicants has grown from about 384,000 in 1992 to nearly 1 million this year, Meissner said.

"Hundreds of thousands of people are seeking the dream and the promise of American citizenship," she said. They have waited, they have worked, they have worried long enough. They should not and they will not be made to wait any longer."

She spoke at the downtown Convention Centre, where 7,000 people from 103 countries were sworn in as new citizens.

Nikki Sorak, a 48-year-old Long Beach restaurant owner, was among them. The Thai immigrant said that at one point in the process, he waited 2 1/2 hours before undergoing a 10-minute interview with questions like: Who is president of the United States? When did the American Revolution start? Who freed the slaves?

But he had no complaints about the current citizenship process. "If you have the guts to do it, you go for it," he said.

Hundreds may starve to death in Sierra Leone

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone, Sept 1: Hundreds of victims of civil war may be starving to death because of the government's inability to protect food convoys to the interior of the country, reports AP.

People from the towns of Kenema, Daru and Segbwema in the eastern part of the west African country say they have buried hundreds of loved ones in the past few weeks.

Some survivors paraded through the streets of Kenema, about 200 miles (320 kilometres) east of the capital, Freetown, on Wednesday in a march to mourn the dead and pray for their salvation.

The military government, at war with the Revolutionary United Front since 1991, denied on Thursday that anyone had starved to death.

PLO-Israel agreement on West Bank unlikely to meet deadline

JERUSALEM, Sept 1: Israel and the PLO made little progress in this week's round of talks, and a West Bank autonomy agreement might not be ready by the September 18 target date proposed by Washington, Palestinian negotiators said Friday, reports AP.

The head of the PLO delegation, Ahmed Qureia, said Israeli and Palestinian leaders would have to resolve the remaining disputes, including over the release of Palestinian prisoners and security in the West Bank town of Hebron.

Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat said Friday that the two sides, meeting in the Red Sea resort of Eilat, have written 320 pages of a draft agreement on Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank. In areas of disagreement, the draft contains both the Israeli and the Palestinian positions, he said.

The key sticking point is the fate of Hebron, the tense town where 450 Jewish settlers live among 80,000 Palestinians, guarded by hundreds of Israeli soldiers.

The Palestinians insist that Israeli troops leave Hebron, in line with earlier promises to pull out of Palestinian population centres. Erakat said the PLO has made some allowances for an Israeli security presence, but that Israel has rejected the plan.

The Palestinians also demand that the 5,000 Palestinian security detainees held by Israel be free in three stages, and that the release dates be part of the autonomy agreement.

Israel has not responded to the Palestinian demand, Erakat told The Associated Press.

Erakat said some progress has been made in the talks on Palestinian general elections, tentatively scheduled for later this year.

Another key sticking point is the participation of Palestinians who live in east Jerusalem, the district Israel captured from Jordan in the 1967 Mideast war.

Israel has agreed to let Palestinians from east Jerusalem vote in the elections. But it has rejected PLO demands that polling stations be set up in the city and that Jerusalem Arabs run for office in the Palestinians' self-rule council.

Negotiators in Eilat "are concentrating efforts on arrangements for the citizens of Jerusalem to participate in the elections within the electoral district of Jerusalem," Erakat said.



An F14 Tomcat aircraft takes off from the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt Thursday for a mission over the former Yugoslavia. Over 60 aircraft from various NATO nations operating from air bases in Italy and the USS Roosevelt have participated in attacks on Bosnian Serb targets. — AFP/UNB photo

Opposition MP's arrest raises tension in ROK

SEOUL, Sept 1: An opposition lawmaker was arrested Friday on corruption charges in a case that sharply heightened political tensions in South Korea, reports AP.

The nation's No. 1 opposition leader, Kim Dae-jung, claimed the charges were fabricated and warned that the case would backfire against his arch-rival, President Kim Young-sam.

Choi Nak-do, 57, a top aide to Kim Dae-jung, was charged with receiving 60 million won (dollar 77,000) in exchange for helping a businessman get a preferential bank loan in 1994.

Under Korean law, legislators cannot sell their influence for financial gain.

Ms. Raphael, who is based in Washington, spoke at a news conference in Sri Lanka, where she is on an official visit.

Last month, in the

Pakistan not involved with Kashmiri kidnappers: Raphael

COLOMBO, Sept 1: A US State Department official on Friday denied claims by India that Pakistan is involved with the Kashmiri separatists who are holding four Westerners hostage, reports AP.

"We don't believe any of the speculation of Pakistan's involvement. We think these are very desperate militant folks, and we don't think they are in anyone's pocket," said Robin Raphael, the assistant secretary of state for South Asia.

Ms. Raphael, who is based in Washington, spoke at a news conference in Sri Lanka, where she is on an official visit.

Last month, in the Himalayan mountains of Jammu-Kashmir, India, the Al-Faran militant group kidnapped six Western tourists: two Americans, two Britons, a German and a Norwegian.

S B Chavan, the interior minister, has said Pakistan is directly involved with Al-Faran. And other Indian officials have said that Pakistan's secret service division ordered the militants to take the tourists hostage.

One of the Americans who was kidnapped soon escaped, but Al-Faran later beheaded the Norwegian and threatened to kill the other four if India failed to free 15 jailed Kashmiri rebels.

Jammu-Kashmir is the only state in mostly Hindu India with a Muslim majority, and dozens of militant groups have been fighting for its independence since late 1989.

Islamic Pakistan has fought two wars with India over Kashmir, which is divided between them by a cease-fire line.

International human rights groups have joined India in accusing Pakistan of arming and training rebel groups that want Jammu-Kashmir to become part of Pakistan. Islamabad denies that.

She also said: "The government of Pakistan has been actively trying to do everything it can."

Off the Record



Former Top Gun singer Robbie Williams (C) became a topless super model as he stepped out in bikini briefs stilletos and black wig to publicise an advertising campaign for the soft drink 7-Up Light on Thursday in London. He was joined by six beautiful models and is reported to have been paid around 100,000 for his services. — AFP/UNB photo

Does she look like a soup bowl?

SINGAPORE: A Singapore employer has been charged in court with pouring a pot of hot chicken soup on her Filipino maid and with committing other physical abuses, The Straits Times reported Wednesday, says AFP.

Lim Puay Leng, 31, who allegedly hit the maid with a clothes hanger, slapped her and hit her several times with a rolled-up newspaper, was let out on bail of 20,000 dollars (14,285 US) after being charged Tuesday, the daily said.

A subordinate court heard that Lim on January 19 poured a pot of chicken soup on the 26-year old domestic, Virginia Jotogota, the newspaper said.

The case was posted for hearing on October 31, it said. More than 60,000 Filipinas are employed in Singapore as domestic helpers.

Relations between Singapore and the Philippines are now being repaired following a crisis triggered by the March hanging of a Filipina maid, Flor Contemplacion, for the 1991 murder of a compatriot and a Singaporean boy.

Taleban recapture govt-held Delaram

KABUL, Sept 1: Afghan authorities said on Thursday the opposition Taleban student militia had recaptured territory seized by government forces in an offensive in the south-west of the country, reports Reuters.

"Taleban has recaptured Delaram," said a Defence Ministry spokesman, Dr Abdullah. "The new frontline is the same as the old frontline we held before the offensive began."

Forces loyal to President Burhanuddin Rabbani pushed Taleban out of its western most stronghold of Delaram in an offensive that began eight days ago and advanced 120 km (80 miles) to Girishk in Helmand province before Taleban counter-attacked.

Abdullah said government forces had retreated and were now dug in about 14 km (nine miles) west of Delaram. Reinforcement were on the way while government aircraft were bombing Taleban's positions for the western airbase of Shindand.

The government offensive now appears to have been a futile and costly exercise. "Setbacks sometimes occur. This is the nature of war," Abdullah said.

He said he had no figures for government casualties, but both sides say they lost large numbers of men. Travellers from Taleban headquarters in the southern town of Kandahar reported seeing about 200 prisoners under Taleban guard.

Abdullah also conceded that another opposition faction had penetrated the air defence network around the government's main airbase north of Kabul.

UK to accept permanent end to N-tests

LONDON, Sept 1: Britain will shortly announce that it has accepted a permanent end to testing for its nuclear weapons, according to a report Friday in the London newspaper The Guardian, reports AP.

The paper quoted an unnamed source close to test-ban treaty negotiations in Geneva as saying it has agreed instead to use US techniques that use instruments to simulate test explosions in order to maintain the safety of its nuclear arsenal.

There was no immediate comment from Prime Minister John Major's government on the report.

India rejects Al-Faran latest demands

SRINAGAR, Sept 1: India has rejected the latest demands by guerrillas in Kashmir for the release of three jailed Pakistani militants in exchange for four Western hostages they are holding, officials said today, reports Reuters.

As talks aimed at securing release of the hostages entered a critical state, officials said Al-Faran militants holding the foreign tourists made their demand during negotiations with Indian officials by radio on Thursday evening.

Al-Faran has offered to release American Donald Hutchings, German Dirk Hasert and Britons Keith Mangan and Paul Wells if India freed 15 militants from prison.